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**Posting the Personal: Some Thoughts
on the Postcard Work of Bill Dane**

I wrote to Bill Dane in March of this year through the agency of his San Francisco dealer, the Fraenkel Gallery. He promptly responded to my inquiry with a generous gift of two exhibition catalogues and a hand-written letter. His letter included some of the humorous idiosyncrasies that I had by that time become familiar with by reading and collecting the messages found on the backs of Dane's photo-postcards which were shown in those books that recognized the value of reprinting both sides of this body of work. He ended his letter with the encouragement: "don't hesitate to ask." A few days later I received a photo-postcard from the artist, apparently sent at the same time as the larger parcel. (Fig.1) The pictorial side is a photograph of a photograph of a man with his back turned to the camera but whose upper body and face is reflected in a mirror. He is knotting his tie. The photograph which is pictured shows signs of warping, crackling and tearing. The man's identity is effaced by the reflection of the camera flash on the surface of the photograph. This multiple erasure of the identity of the individual pictured, however, I read allegorically as both a metaphor for the distancing effect of photographic representation as well as commentary on the situation I was involved in, that is, wanting to know Bill Dane, wanting information about the artist, wanting to make contact with the person. These themes were exacerbated by the content of one of the books sent to me, a 1993 exhibition catalogue of Dane's black and white photo work from 1971 to 1981. This is the period in which Dane produced most of the 20,000 photo-postcards he has mailed to friends and relatives, artists, critics, academics, museum and

gallery curators. The book is titled Outside and Inside America and is divided in two sections, each prefaced by what one might call a personal photograph.¹ The first is of Dane and his immediate family and the second is of four individuals who seem to be relatives, judging by resemblances to the artist. (Fig.2) These pictures seem to tell us something about the artist's life and are at odds with the generally ironic tone of Dane's photo work. Most importantly, however, these pictures seem to function as alibis for the missing postcard notes, the personalized versos. The 1993 exhibition would appear to have been comprised of prints of the images, bearing no relation to the conceptual framework within which Dane's images circulated in his early career as a photographer. It is against their postcard backings with scribbled notes and addresses that these images came to be known. Indeed, it is within an economy of personal/impersonal, communication/information, distance and proximity that Dane's postcards held their performative embrace. Writing on the aporias of the type of binary distinctions I have just drawn, philosopher Jacques Derrida states:

These proportional analogies are constructed on a certain number of apparently irreducible oppositions. How are they finally, as they always do, going to dissolve? And to the advantage of what political economy? In order to dissolve, as they always do, the oppositions must be produced, must be propagated and multiplied. The process is one that has to

¹Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America (Granada, Spain: Palacio De Los Condes de Gabia, 1993).

be followed.²

An abyss separates two halves of a whole that don't add up. The singular Bill Dane postcard in the collection at the George Eastman House is kept in the manuscript collection, privileging the verso. The exhibition Outside and Inside America makes the opposite judgment in favour of the image. But these are the concerns of the archivist. I want to consider instead those of the historian -the historian of transitory letter types like postcards and familiar models of representation like the snapshot.

In 1897, in a well-known appraisal of the artistic potential of the hand-held camera, Alfred Stieglitz wrote:

Photography as a fad is well-nigh on its last legs, thanks principally to the bicycle craze. Those seriously interested in its advancement do not look upon this state of affairs as a misfortune, but as a disguised blessing, inasmuch as photography had been classed as a sport by nearly all of those who deserted its ranks and fled to the present idol, the bicycle. The only persons who seem to look upon this turn of affairs as entirely unwelcome are those engaged in manufacturing and selling photographic goods. It was, undoubtedly, due to the hand camera that photography became so generally popular a few years ago. Every Tom, Dick and Harry could, without trouble, learn how to get something or other on a sensitive plate, and this is what the public wanted - no work and lots of fun. Thanks to the efforts of these persons hand camera and bad work became synonymous. The climax was reached when an enterprising firm flooded the market with a very ingenious hand camera and the announcement, "You press the button, and we do the rest."³

While Stieglitz may have been involved with the advancement of

²Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," Diacritics 11:2 (Summer 1981) 4.

³Alfred Stieglitz, "The Hand Camera - Its Present Importance," in Beaumont Newhall, ed. On Photography: A Source Book of Photo History in Facsimile (Watkins Glen, N.Y.: Century House, 1956) 133-134.

photography, most people were busy dreaming of trips and holidays, if they could afford them. George Eastman in many ways, was the more prophetic man, pitching his Kodak camera first and foremost to travellers and tourists, cyclists and boaters, sportsmen and ocean travellers. As he stated in the booklet, The Kodak Camera, "Anybody can use it. Everybody will use it."⁴

Included in the pantheon of popular pleasures, and cousin to the snapshot photograph is that of the postcard. An 1899 account reproduces Stieglitz's example of mass culture critique:

The illustrated postcard craze, like the influenza, has spread to these [British] islands from the Continent where it has been raging with considerable severity... Germany is a special sufferer from the circulation of these missives. The travelling Teuton seems to regard it as a solemn duty to distribute them from each stage of his journey, as if he were a runner in a paper chase. His first care on reaching some place of note is to lay in a stock, and alternate the sipping of beer with conscientiously devoting to this task the hours of the railway journey. Would-be vendors beset the traveller on the tops of hills, and among the ruins of the lowlands, in the hotel, the café, and even the railway train. They are all over the country, from one end of the Fatherland to the other...⁵

This account is not surprising perhaps, considering the ubiquity and extent of the postcard's accessibility. In the period between 1905 and 1915, an annual amount of one billion picture postcards

⁴Cited in Brian Coe and Paul Gates, The Snapshot Photograph: The Rise of Popular Photography, 1888-1939 (London: Ash and Grant, 1977) 18.

⁵Anonymous author, from The Standard (August 21, 1899), cited in Frank Staff, The Picture Postcard & Its Origins (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) 60.

were sold.⁶ The ritualistic aspects surrounding postcard practices have been noted, and to the present we recognize its clichégenic features before even beginning to address its share in the creation of social relations.

The historically sedimented contempt levelled at the postcard image as a commercial art applies equally to the scriptural side of the artefact. High modernist author Georges Perec, for instance, posits at most 243 writerly possibilities for the postcard message - and all these, "in true colour."⁷ Similarly, artists Diller and Scofidio include in their photo/essay, "Hostility into Hospitality," a series of generic postcards with the scripted words: The Date; The Salutation; Interpretive Account; The Description of the Site; The Travel Itinerary; The Undecipherable Statement; The Closing; The Signature - and on the right hand side: Proper Name; Street Address; City & State; Zip Code; Country. Other variants of their generic postcards include: Account of Verisimilitude; The Domestic Inquiry; The Remark to Elicit Envy; Reassessment of Tactics; Meal and Accommodation Comments; The Pedagogical Recount; Reflection of Reverential Power; Moral Inference; Zealous Patriotic Assertion; Flagrant Generalization; Nostalgic Longing for Lost Values; Vivid Imaginings and finally,

⁶Brooke Baldwin, "On the Verso: Postcard Messages as a key to Popular Prejudices," Journal of Popular Culture 22:3 (Winter 1988) 15.

⁷Georges Perec, "Deux cent quarante-trois cartes postales en couleurs véritables," in his L'infra-ordinaire (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

Empathetic Imaginings.⁸ (Fig.3)

The Social Landscape

In the relation between recto and verso there seems to have evolved, if perhaps by design, a conspicuous balance between form and content; conspicuous for the magnitude of its potential but consequent triviality. These balances and elisions are essential to my understading of Dane's postcard work. In order to travel back to the site of Dane's photographic beginnings, however, it is necessary to consider the aesthetic field from which work like his emerged. Three well-known photography exhibitions are on the itinerary. You will remember Thomas Garver's 1966 exhibition for the Rose Museum, Twelve Photographers of the American Social Landscape, Nathan Lyons' Contemporary Photographers of the American Social Landscape at the George Eastman House in 1966, and John Szarkowski's New Documents at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967. As Jonathan Green remarked, all of the photographers included in these exhibitions, "recapitulate the major traditions of straight photography."⁹ We are dealing therefore with a photography of citation. Green places Dane and others in the tradition of the New Documents and within the formal frame of Szarkowski's modernist aesthetic. Green's stylistic ascription is supported by the fact

⁸Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, "Hostility into Hospitality," in Diller + Scofidio, eds. Back to the Front: Tourisms of War (Basse Normandie: F.R.A.C., 1994) 278-321.

⁹Jonathan Green, American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984) 106.

that Dane studied with Arbus and Friedlander in 1971 and as early as 1973 had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (entitled Unfamiliar Places - an exhibition of 80 slides). Szarkowski's insistence on the photographic medium's five essential qualities (the thing itself, time, the vantage point, the detail, the frame - as outlined in The Photographer's Eye), however, emphasized formal detachment and a conceptual parodying of the "straight aesthetic."¹⁰ Szarkowski states in the New Documents:

Most of those who were called documentary photographers a generation ago...made their pictures in the service of a social cause...to show what was wrong with the world, and to persuade their fellows to take action and make it right... A new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has not been to reform life, but to know it... What they hold in common is the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to look at it within a minimum of theorizing."¹¹

In the case of Bill Dane, emotional detachment, or rather, the encoding of "the personal," is precisely what drives the conceptual force of the postcards. Ironically, it is this process element and its daily routine which Szarkowski would later consider a diversion in Dane's continuing practice; a fresh idea, and a conceptual practice of gift giving, pushed to the limits of the art frame as well as to the limits of sociability, where the personal slides

¹⁰Green, 102.

¹¹John Szarkowski cited in Keith F. Davis, An American Century in Photography: From Dry-Plate to Digital (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995) 296. The New Documents exhibition featured the works by Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand.

into the "ob-scene" of the informational.¹²

To touch briefly on the two other exhibitions mentioned, I want to stress in these an important point of correspondence, and this is the production of a discourse of authenticity, a theme which resonates with the theories of tourism to which I will return below. Nathan Lyons' catalogue entry for his presentation of "social landscape" photography gives thoughtful consideration to the "snapshot" idiom. Questioning the dismissals of the work of amateurs, as in the case of Stieglitz, Lyons considers the visual environment from an ecological perspective, taking the millions of fumbled snapshots, their "multiple exposures, distortions, unusual perspectives, [and] foreshortening of planes," as authentic contributions to the "visual vocabulary" of photography. Discerning the conscious use of the snapshot aesthetic in the work of five contemporary photographers, Lyons writes:

I do not find it hard to believe that photographers who have been concerned with the question of the authentic relevance of events and objects should consciously or unconsciously adopt one of the most authentic picture forms photography has produced.¹³

This concern with authenticity is also evident in Thomas Garver's curatorial statement for 12 Photographers of the American Social

¹²John Szarkowski. Former Director of the Department of Photography, Museum of Modern Art. Telephone interview, March 19, 1998. The idea of the informational "ob-scene" is attributed to Jean Baudrillard, see Hal Foster, ed. The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983) xiv.

¹³Nathan Lyons, "Introduction," Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1966). The exhibition included works by Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, Danny Lyon, and Duane Michaels.

Landscape. Leaving aside the problematic category of "landscape," Garver also focuses on the ecology of the visual environment, distinguishing the practice of contemporary art photographers from popular snapshot use. He cites Boorstin's notion of "pseudo-events" ascribing the repertorial, the illusionistic and the image-making to the producers of "pseudo":

Photography finds itself today flooded with practitioners. Literally millions of photographers are aiming their cameras at everything, to produce what Daniel Boorstin calls "pictures of trivia bigger and more real than life"... "We forget that we see trivia and notice only that the reproduction is so good".¹⁴

Among some of his theoretical departures, one can note his insistence that these artists make use of the snapshot to depict real events. More "involved with the artifacts of society than those who produce or use them," Garver insists nevertheless that their work is not noncommittal but invested in what Percec called the "infra-ordinary."¹⁵ (Note that Garver curated a solo exhibition of Dane's work in 1977 for the M.H. de Young Museum in San Francisco.)

Our tour of 1960s "social landscape" photography would not be complete without mention of William Jenkins' New Topographics held at the GEH in 1975. Most of the glosses on the New Topographics

¹⁴Boorstin cited in Thomas H. Garver, "Introduction," 12 Photographers of the American Social Landscape Rose Art Museum (Waltham, Mass: Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis U., 1967). The exhibition included works by Bruce Davidson, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Ralph Gibson, Warren Hill, Rudolph Janu, Simpson Kalisher, Danny Lyon, James Marchael, Duane Michaels, Philip Perkis, Tom Zimmerman.

¹⁵Garver, "Introduction."

have merely re-emphasized aspects of the original framework laid out by Jenkins. Among these are "truth" to the medium maintained with an ambivalence viz. the content (Green); studied formalism (Katzman); emotional distance (Phillips); and stylistic quality married to banal subjects (Ratcliffe).¹⁶ Jenkins noted the influence of Edward Ruscha's structuralist approach on contemporary photography. The serial, deadpan quality of Ruscha's process was combined with nineteenth-century representational constructs to create a new type of documentation that pictured both the content and the broader "conceptual and referential" subject matter simultaneously. This minimal aesthetic, in Jenkins' estimation, declined all aspects of "beauty, emotion and opinion."¹⁷ I am tempted to dislodge Dane's work from this history and to consider it in relation to more recent interest in critical approaches to everyday life, but these in some way exceed what is already present in his idiosyncratic form of mail art.¹⁸ A more appropriate area

¹⁶Green, 107; Louise Katzman, Photography in California, 1945-1980 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (New York: Hudson Hill Press, 1984) 90; Sandra Phillips, "To Subdue the Continent: Photographs of the Developing West," in Crossing the Frontier: Photographs of the Developing West, 1840 to the Present (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1996) 40; Carter Ratcliffe, "Route 66 Revisited: The New Landscape Photography," Art in America 64:1 (Jan/Feb 1976) 90.

¹⁷William Jenkins, "Introduction," New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1975). The artists included in this exhibition were Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, Henry Wessel, Jr..

¹⁸As is correctly noted by Peter Turner, Dane is not a "mail artist" in the proper sense. His exhibition history excludes him from this particular type of process-oriented and post-studio practice. The use of the postal system as an alternative site for

of investigation, I think, is the personal character of the photo-postcards.

The Postcard is Personal

Another field of explanation for the revision of Dane's postcard work is the general area of "personal photography." Szarkowski's eschewing of the conceptual and the political in favour of straight photography's appeal to the subjective interiority of the humanist-photographer is founded in an American tradition (mostly male) involving the work of Edward Weston, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank. Scene and street photography combined documentary concerns with private experience. This was extended into social landscape photography, and as Green remarks, the "hybridity of the documentary and the personal would become the defining quality of American street photography."¹⁹ Dane's work is in keeping with this tradition but distinct in two ways: first, for the ironic humour of his personal messages and secondly, for having taken the genre of American scene photography to foreign shores.²⁰ Dane produces intimate portraits of everyday subjects in locales as various as Europe, Mexico, Central America, China, Japan, and

the production of the work's meaning, however, does place him in the nexus of mail art activity. Peter Turner, ed. American Photography, 1945-1980. Barbican Art Gallery (New York: Viking, 1985) 217. Cf. Michael Becotte, ed. Mail Etc., Art (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1980).

¹⁹Green, 107.

²⁰This second point is remarked by Leo Rubinfien, "Love/Hate Relations," Artforum 16:10 (Summer 1978) 51.

Northern Africa. (Fig.4,5) At home or abroad, Dane applies the same tactic of making the familiar strange, and making the familiar an unavoidable part of the visual field. As Ann Swidler states, "Dane has interested himself in human artifacts, man-made objects whose capacity to communicate has somehow gone awry."²¹ What better medium to inform this short-circuit of human engagement than the postcard?

Green's thesis on the personal aspects of documentary photography argues that these could be seen as part and parcel of everyday forms of representation, and in particular, those that have to do with travel. Literary theorist Susan Stewart has commented on the narrative structures of such tourist items as the snapshot, the postcard and the souvenir. All of these artifacts and their concomitant practices inscribe the personal into the public and vice versa. She notes that despite the availability of postcards at most tourist sites, we often choose, nevertheless, to take our own photographs, we appropriate the public nature of places and privatize experience. For Stewart these practices begin with the tour. She states that the

function of the tour is the estrangement of objects - to make what is visible, what is surface, reveal a profound interiority through narrative. This interiority is that of the perceiving subject; it is gained at the expense of risking contamination (hence the dire and dirty lanes) and the dissolution of boundary of that subject. The process is later recapitulated more safely within the context of the familiar,

²¹Ann Swidler, "Bill Dane: Photographs Outside and Inside America," in Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America, 12.

the home, by means of the souvenir.²²

The postcard, as a form of souvenir, extends the personal narrative of the tourist to that of the recipient by means of the gift and thereby reaffirms the social articulation of the self. But there is still a problem of distance, a further need to "appropriate distance," as Stewart says. This need is negotiated in the addressee's reception of the gift, and in the gift's subsequent inclusion in the collection or in its presentation as a display object. Here one begins to understand how the postcards Dane sent to curators functioned in both an exchange economy and an economy of scarcity. The intention of his cards, whether personal, informational, or careerist is not as important as their factuality in a given set of relations, relations that have been ritualized in the period since the late nineteenth-century invention of the postcard.

There is a historicity, then, to the broad narrative structures Stewart presents, and it is perhaps worthwhile to consider some of its circumstances. One can notice in the archaeology of the postcard, a latent tension between its opposing faces. In the mid-nineteenth century, before the institutionalization of the postcard format, ornamental writing paper carried images of resorts and sites of interest to the traveller. When sent home, the images were most often cut off from their corresponding messages and

²²Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) 146.

pasted in a family album.²³ A further line of inquiry is the public character of both sides. When the "open post sheet" or postcard was inaugurated in the 1860s, the public expressed its aversion to open communications, warning of the decline of the art of letter writing and lamenting the restraint of decency. One main opposition was the ease with which one could read someone else's private message. The low cost of the postcard and its popular character as mass culture also drew the usual reproach of the Victorian middle class. This reproach was undoubtedly entrenched as the promotional peddling of postcards at every conceivable tourist site became common practice by the turn of the century. Of particular interest here is the development of the personal photographic postcard. In the first decade of this century, Kodak (1902) and other companies printed personal snapshots onto postcard photo paper. Cards printed after 1907 divided the back section in two halves, with one side reserved for the message and the other for the mailing address. The announcement of rural free delivery in 1898 made the personal photographic postcard a new and inexpensive means of making contact with distant family and friends. John Baskin suggests that in some cases the mailing of personal picture postcards was not a light matter, with images being taken very seriously. Baskin mentions that despite a large number of such cards in his family collection, it was not in the

²³Staff, 14-20.

habit of his family to "mail our relatives around the countryside."²⁴ But the photographic postcard was not only used for private purposes; in the first decade of the century, the postcard-backed paper was used mostly by independent merchants who could easily produce substantial numbers of cards with the use of specially designed quick-printing machines.²⁵ Pictorial and photographic postcards undoubtedly figure in the "visual environment" that Lyons and Garver describe even if perhaps destined for personal family albums and antique shops. These images inspired Walker Evans who spoke of their "endearing ugliness" in less than nostalgic terms. Evans considered photographic postcards true (read: authentic) visual records in a manner analogous to the proponents of the social landscape genre:

In the 1900s, sending and saving picture postcards was a prevalent and often deadly boring fad in a million middle-class family homes. Yet the plethora of cards printed in that period now forms a solid bank from which to draw some of the most charming and, on occasion, the most horrid mementos ever bequeathed one generation by another.²⁶

A final footnote in this focus on the personal nature of the postcard is the common practice among photographers to send post

²⁴John Baskins cited in Hal Morgan and Andreas Brown, Prairie Fires and Paper Moons: The American Photographic Postcard: 1900-1920 (Boston: David R. Godine, 1981) viii.

²⁵Cf. Edward John Wall, The Photographic Picture Postcard For Personal Use and for Profit (London: Dawbarn & Ward, 1906).

²⁶Walker Evans cited in Jonathan Green, ed. The Snapshot (New York: Aperture, 1974) 95.

card-size photos to friends and colleagues as greeting cards.²⁷ It may be that Dane got his cue from this custom. If so, his work departs from the sentimental, stretching the limits of cordiality and entering the field of the unfamiliar or the foreign. All of this is tinged with a humour and tackiness which is somehow both uneasy and at home in the world.

Of Photographers and Tourists

I want to turn now to a genre of photographs to which we could relate the work of Bill Dane, but only if we skew the genre on its axis and make it speak otherwise. But let us begin with the model. There is a rite of passage that every street photographer and possibly every tourist with a camera undergoes. This is the moment of the reflexive image, the picture of a person taking a picture; the genre is that of the photographic meta-comment. In a description of Garry Winogrand's Dallas, 1964, Carl Chiarenza describes the touristic ritual of souvenir production through photographic evidence. (Fig.6) In his discussion, Chiarenza emphasizes Winogrand's concern with the "structure of the surface".²⁸ He draws attention to the mediation of reality through photographic representation, to the postcards in the hands of the people who have travelled to the site of Kennedy's assassination.

²⁷For a personal record of such gift-giving by fellow photographers and friends see Robert Frank's Thank You (Zurich: Scalo, 1996).

²⁸Carl Chiarenza, "Standing on the Corner... Reflections Upon Winogrand's Photographic Gaze: Mirror of Self or World? Part I," Image 34:3-4 (Fall/Winter 1991) 31.

For Chiarenza, the visual image is unreal, restricted to surface and facade but at the same time is a sign which functions in the production of spectatorial desire for the real. Another image described is Winogrand's Apollo 11 Moon Shot, Cape Kennedy, Florida, 1969, an image "about experiencing a life made photographically".²⁹ (Fig.7) Also in this genre is Lee Friedlander's Mt. Rushmore, South Dakota (1969). (Fig.8) In this photograph Friedlander makes use of his signature style, using glass reflections to layer the image. The pointing cameras of the tourists, like the extended forefinger of the woman in Dallas, 1964, references the indexical function of the image in documentary representation. Images of such scenes reflexively translate the framing of sites of visual consumption and thereby heighten the artist's aesthetic interest, his one-upmanship and awareness of the touristic or spectatorial frame.

This mode, however, has become part and parcel of aesthetic reflexivity throughout the period of modernization. For John Urry, this type of aesthetic cosmopolitanism has become more prevalent as a result of both the proliferation of real and simulated mobility, and of the social organization of travel and tourism.³⁰ Elsewhere, Caren Kaplan has argued that the aestheticization of foreign places is embedded in the structure of modernity. She writes that for the tourist "the site of the authentic is continually displaced,

²⁹Chiarenza, 32.

³⁰John Urry, Consuming Places (London: Routledge, 1994) 145.

located in another country".³¹ One should note also the implications of such aesthetic interest in histories of colonialism and in the politics of social spatialisation. These subjects are precisely what the mannered works of both Friedlander and Winogrand exclude, their desired readings being aesthetic, "converting instrumental use of [the] medium into formal and metacritical ones".³²

If we move from art criticism of representational truth to the politics of representation, Friedlander's and Winogrand's images are left wanting. Martha Rosler has stated that although Friedlander broke norms of expectation with regard to formal codes, he nevertheless did not reject his photographs' "transcendental aim."³³ These aims are inscribed in his works' formal rejection of truth value. This type of aesthetic detachment continued into the colour photography of artists like Stephen Shore and William Eggleston and in the genre of tourist meta-comment of contemporary photographers such as Len Jenschel, Roger Minick, Reinhard Mucha, Thomas Struth, Martin Parr, and Constantine Manos.

Before relating this theme to Dane's photo postcards, I would like to extend this issue of the tourist frame and reintroduce the notions of authenticity which underwrote Lyons' and Garver's understanding of social landscape photography. This question of

³¹Caren Kaplan, Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 64.

³²Martha Rosler, "Lee Friedlander's Guarded Strategies," Artforum 13:8 (April 1975) 47.

³³Rosler, 47.

authenticity is essential to modern touristic practice. What the discourse on tourism as well as that of photographic discourse must consider is the hermeneutic entanglement of the authentic and the mediated. As Jonathan Culler states,

The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself and hence not authentic in the sense of unspoiled.³⁴

The real or the authentic is structurally related to the inauthentic or artificial and produced along this continuum. The discourse of authenticity disavows this relationship. This attention to the critique of the inauthentic forms the basis to Dean MacCannell's review of Daniel Boorstin's comments on tourism, an approach more recently analyzed by John Frow. Boorstin's discussion of "pseudo-events" figures in the discourse of tourism as a indictment of the artificial character of touristic mass culture, and demonstrates according to Frow, a "deep anxiety about those democratic values which he claims to espouse."³⁵ To this viewpoint, Frow contrasts Dean MacCannell's positive depiction of tourism as "a quest for, rather than a turn from...[an] authentic experience of the world".³⁶ Aesthetic interest in sites is constituted for MacCannell by markers of authenticity such as postcards, guidebooks, brochures, stories and so on. Five stages

³⁴Jonathan Culler cited in John Frow, "Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia," October #57 (Summer 1991) 130.

³⁵Frow, 127.

³⁶Frow, 127. Cf. Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Schocken Books, 1989).

constitute a process of "site sacralization": the naming stage, the framing stage, the transformation of the frame itself as an attraction, mechanical reproductions of the sight, and social reproduction of its cultural value.³⁷ For MacCannell, the tourist functions metonymically as the quintessential modern subject.

I would like to consider at this point Bill Dane's 1976 photograph of the pyramids at Giza, an image that can perhaps stand in as exemplary of his postcard work, and recommend to this task John Urry's theory of the limits of tourism in a positional economy. (Fig.9) Urry distinguishes between two types of tourist gaze. The first, called the "romantic gaze," is derived from the Kantian aesthetic and places emphasis on solitude, privacy and personal experience. The second is the "collective gaze," a touristic practice of taking pleasure in public sites and necessitating the enjoyment and presence of other tourists. Consider for example the distinction between Maxime Du Camp's picture of the colossus at Abu Simbel and P. Sebah's photograph of the Sphinx at Giza. (Fig.10,11) Dane's photograph of the pyramids hybridizes these two ideal poles. The site is evidently signposted and a mass of empty chairs anticipates a spectacle of some sort. Further in the distance, groups of tourists ascend a passageway to the pyramids. Dane preserves in this instance the "correct distance" in order to capture the pyramids' aesthetic presence. I read the following quote from Kant ironically through the filter of

³⁷These are summarized in Maureen P. Sherlock, "The Accidental Tourist," in Eye of Nature (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1991) 127-128.

Urry's positional economy:

Hence can be explained what Savary remarks, in his account of Egypt, viz. that we must keep from going too far from them, in order to get the full emotional effect from their size. For if we are too far away, the parts to be apprehended (the stones lying one over the other) are only obscurely represented, and the representation of them produces no effect upon the aesthetical judgment of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the bottom up to the apex, and then the first tiers are always partly forgotten before the imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension of them is never complete.³⁸

Dane captures in this scene the proper distance from which to distinguish himself from the tourist. This instance of touristic shame (MacCannell), like that of the genre of the meta-comment, is based on a guilt trip, an anxiety that is produced in the structure of the photographic enterprise. Frow notes that tourism destroys the authenticity it seeks to capture.³⁹ The photographic means it employs transforms people and places into images. As MacCannell argues elsewhere, photography denies the relationship between profit and exploitation. He notes that while "taking someone's picture doesn't cost them anything", the picture nevertheless produces value.⁴⁰ This could perhaps account for the relative absence of people in Dane's photography, or the relative disinterest in capturing the individuality of the subject. On the other hand, one wonders about his evasiveness and lavish attention

³⁸Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951) 90.

³⁹Frow, 146.

⁴⁰Dean MacCannell, Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers (New York: Routledge, 1992) 29.

brought to seemingly inconsequential situations. Dane's work functions also in relation to the touristic meta-comment genre inasmuch as his works are sent as postcards, involving any given image in a postal system that includes in its repertoire domestic scenes as well as foreign sights. But to come back to the dilemma of proper distance, Maureen Sherlock mentions that for Kant the beautiful "peacefully rests with form, order and law, while the sublime isolates us in a confrontation with what cannot yet be represented".⁴¹ Consider here Jean François Lyotard's notion of the photographic sublime which posits contemporary photography's relief from the responsibility of mimetic representation. He includes in his essay on this subject Winogrand's Dallas, 1964. As photography enters the field of aesthetics, Lyotard argues, it realizes and concludes the illusionistic ambition of renaissance perspective. "The governing principle of the postindustrial techno-scientific world," he states, "is not the need to represent the representable, but rather the opposite principle."⁴² I would argue further that one of the aporias of contemporary theory that is well-travelled but never quite mapped out is the gap between the private and public, between the social and the personal. It is this space of undecidability that Dane's postcard work pictures but can never represent. It is within the institutional spaces of art and the networks of the postal system, however, that it becomes

⁴¹Sherlock, 128.

⁴²Jean-François Lyotard, "Presenting the Unpresentable: the Sublime," Artforum 20:8 (April 1982) 69.

visible. The traces of this ordering, its methodical dating and place-naming, its pummelling by rough handling, and its inadvertent smudges are stamped on the surfaces of the photo postcards. (Fig.12) In some cases, these signs are brought to us with modifications such as: "Courtesy of the Fraenkel Gallery," or, "Collection of the author."

Conclusion: Promotion into Reciprocity

In contrast to what I have said about the meta-comment, a number of critics have noted how Dane's understatements often depict the "wrong moment."⁴³ His tourist snaps are of "things that aren't going anywhere".⁴⁴ So defenceless are his subjects, so exposed are his photographs that you want to take them home with you, but are apprehensive of serious involvement. Notice John Fitzgibbons' reluctance to open up to Dane's promotional entreaty:

A dozen years ago I began getting postcards from Bill Dane, an artist friend I knew as a painter but not as a photographer. The cards were gratuitous, something extra to deal with, so at first a little annoying. You can't defend yourself against the mail... Along with a lot of other people in the art world I started to welcome the news they brought from Bill's sensibility. If for a month or so nothing arrived from Bill Dane, I would look hopefully at the postlady. I was hooked.⁴⁵

What dislodges the everyday postcard from the properly aesthetic is

⁴³Ellen Handy, "Bill Dane, John Gutman, Stephen McKeown," Arts Magazine 57:10 (June 1983) 34; John Fitzgibbon, "Death Valley to Phoenix to Santa Fe and the Sangre de Cristo...Hope You Like It'," Aperture #94 (Spring 1984) 24.

⁴⁴Bill Berkson, "Bill Dane," Artforum Vol.25 (November 1986) 144.

⁴⁵Fitzgibbon, 22.

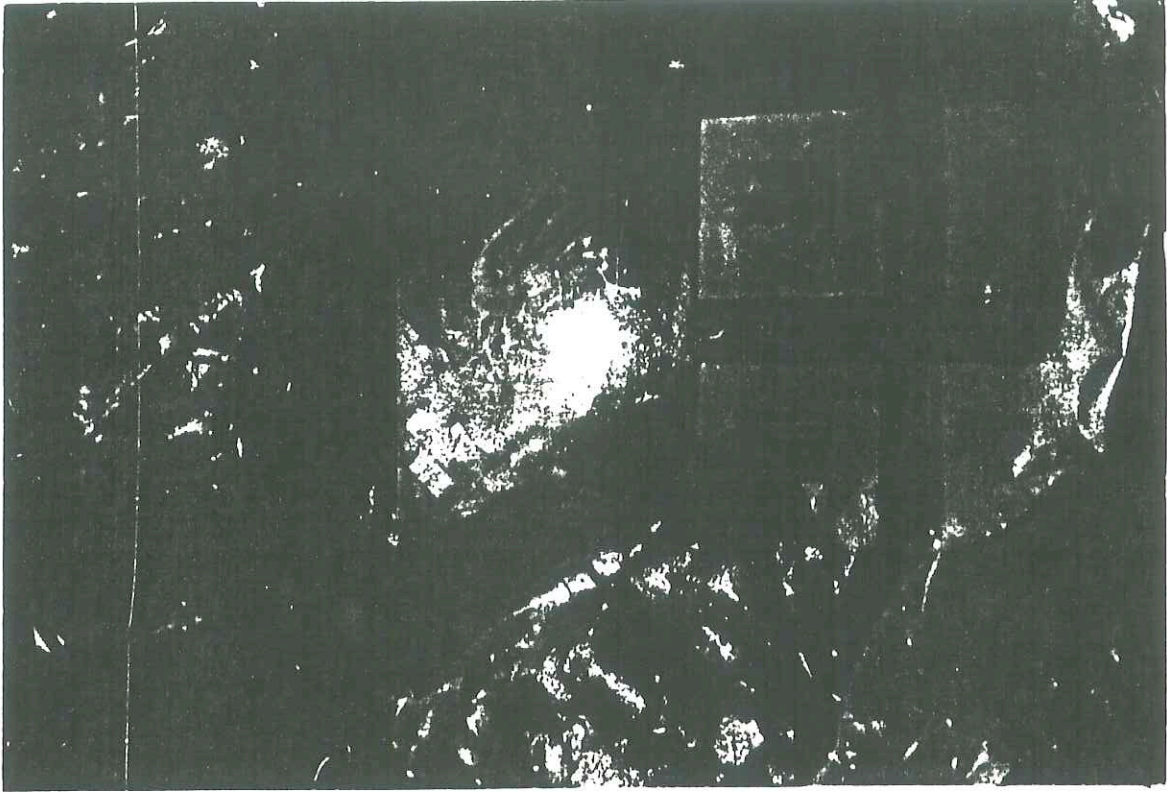
its unashamed promotional nature. Its commerce seems to come in advance of its artistic merit. The history of the postcard is informed by such orderings. For instance, the postcard is derived in part from the early visiting card which was delivered in advance of the caller's appointment. Postcards were used by businesses as bills of sale, preceding and circumscribing the exchange of values. And in the more formalized practices of travel, the postcard, as we have seen, mediates and constructs the authenticated value of tourist sites. It is this traffic in pictures which implicates the card in social relations that produce the photographic image as a commodity, as object of exchange and personalized marker of "propriate interests." As a gift, the delivered postcard is never fully that of the recipient; a share of its value must be repaid. It is in this sense that Dane hooks his addressees in an economy of recognition, blurring the boundary between production and consumption. Thus the proprietary mark on many of Dane's postcard messages and in the signed dedication he wrote on the front page of one of the catalogues he sent me: "my pleasure, Bill."

Thanks

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig.1 Bill Dane, photographic postcard
Collection of the author
- Fig.2 Bill Dane, Bill Dane and Family
Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America
- Fig.3 Diller + Scofidio, from the photo-essay
"Hostility into Hospitality"
- Fig.4 Bill Dane, Accra, Ghana (1976)
Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America
- Fig.5 Bill Dane, Teotihuacan, Mexico (1974)
Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America
- Fig.6 Garry Winogrand, Dallas (1964)
Winogrand: Fragments from the Real World
- Fig.7 Garry Winogrand, Apollo 11 Moon Shot,
Cape Kennedy, Florida (1969)
Winogrand: Fragments from the Real World
- Fig.8 Lee Friedlander, Mt. Rushmore, South Dakota
(1969), Crossing the Frontier...
- Fig.9 Bill Dane, Giza, Egypt (1976)
Bill Dane: Outside and Inside America
- Fig.10 Maxime Du Camp, The Colossus of Abu Simbel,
Egypt (1851), postcard
- Fig.11 P. Sebah, Spalding American baseball party,
Chicago vs. all America at the Sphinx (1889)
postcard
- Fig.12 Bill Dane, Las Vegas (1973)
Mirrors and Windows...

Fig.1



SF Marc Léger, your letter come today 3/7 and this was a very good thing! Thank you



RS Help is on the way Bill Dene
510-527-3172
wait!

Marc Léger
89 Brunswick
Rochester, NY, 14607

Fig.2



Fig. 3

Pie Lee Role

Lunch
Memorial to the French Squadrons Bomber Co
1:00

The Salutation
Reflection of
revelational point.
The description of
site. The travel
Itinerary. The
domestic inquiry.
The closing
The signature

Proper Name
Street Address
City & State
Zip Code
Country

The Date
The Salutation,
Moral inference, The
indiscoverable statement
The travel itinerary.
Meal and accommoda-
tion comments.
The closing.
The signature

Proper Name
Street Address
City, State,
Zip Code,
Country

American Ranger Memorial at Pointe du Hoc

Gas
Memorial to the 58th Armored Artillery Battalion
11:00

The Date
The Salutation,
Zealous patriotism
assertion. Flaming
generalization. The
travel itinerary.
The indiscoverable
statement. The
closing. The signature

Proper Name
Street Address
City, State
Zip Code
Country

V. THAT HAD TO BE DONE AND WE WERE ALLOTTED TO IT. THAT'S IT. YOU DO

5th Engineer Special Brigade Memorial

VIDEO PAN 1st Infantry Division Memorial Obelisk and Seat

The Colleville-sur-Mer American Cemetery

PICTURE THIS. THEY'RE PUNNED DOWN. GUNS. SMOKE. EXPLOSIONS. GUYE

Comité du Débarquement Monument to the 29th

The closing
The signature

Country

Fig.5

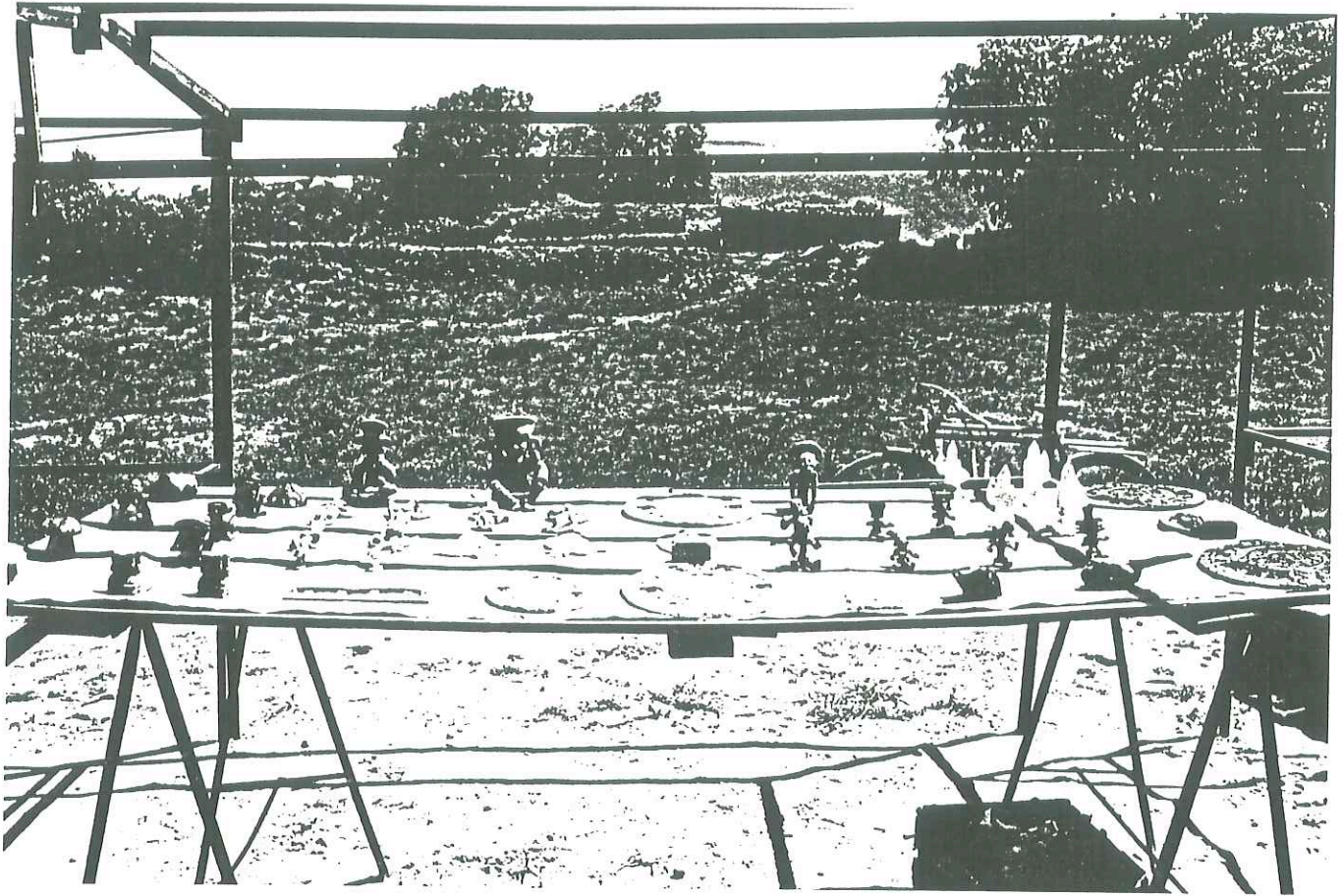


Fig.6

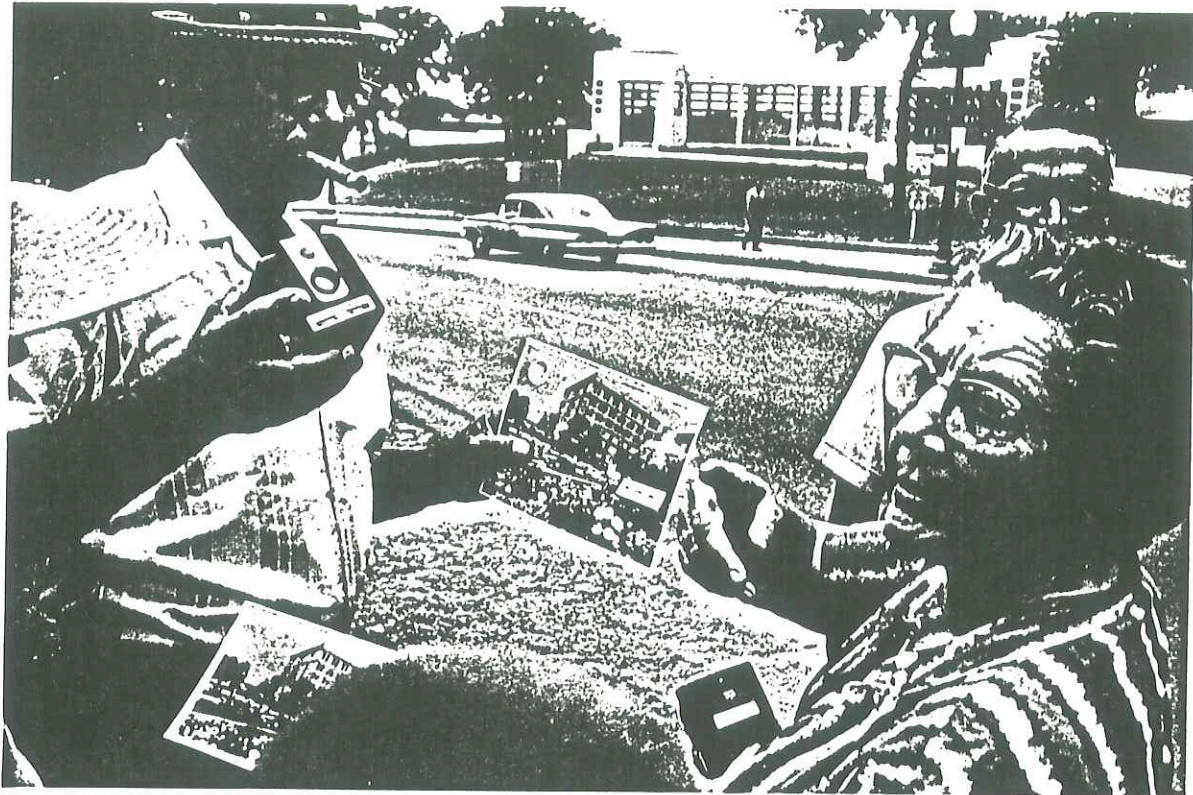


Fig. 7



Fig.8

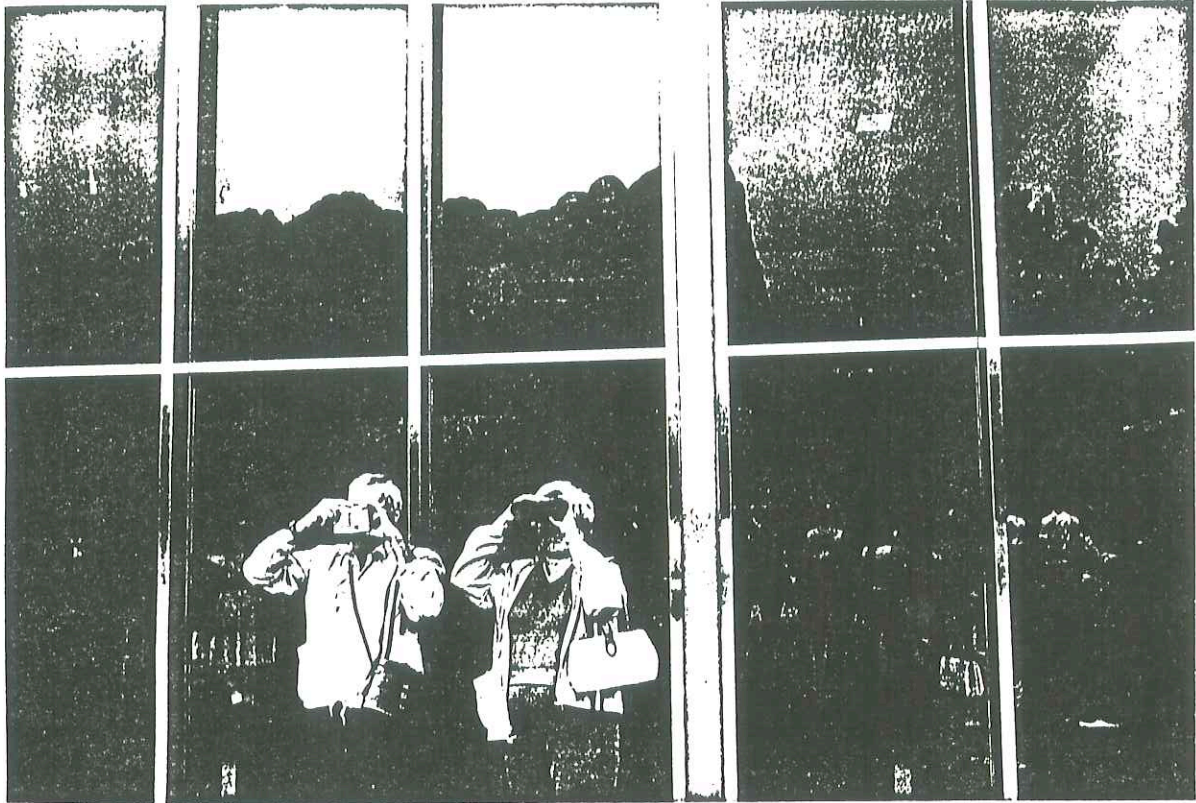


Fig.9

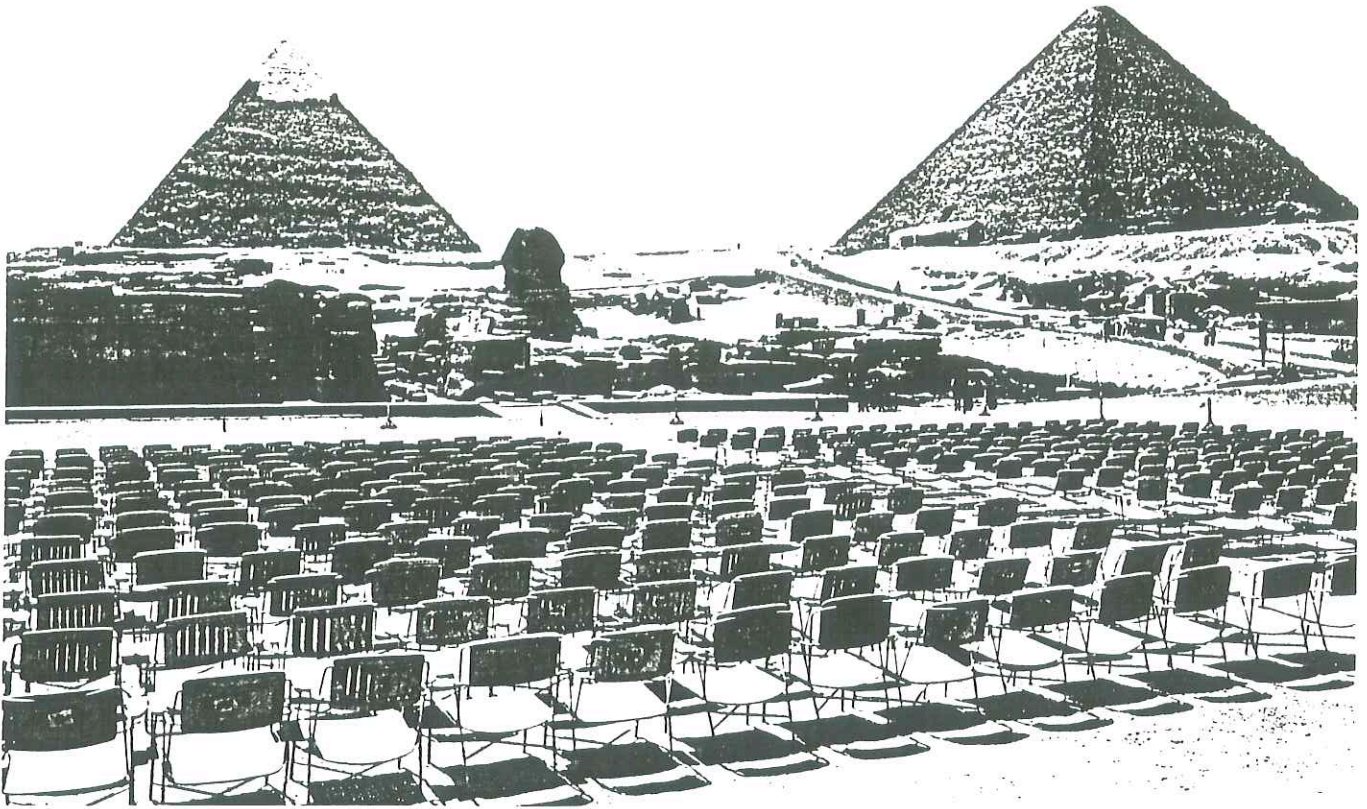


Fig.10

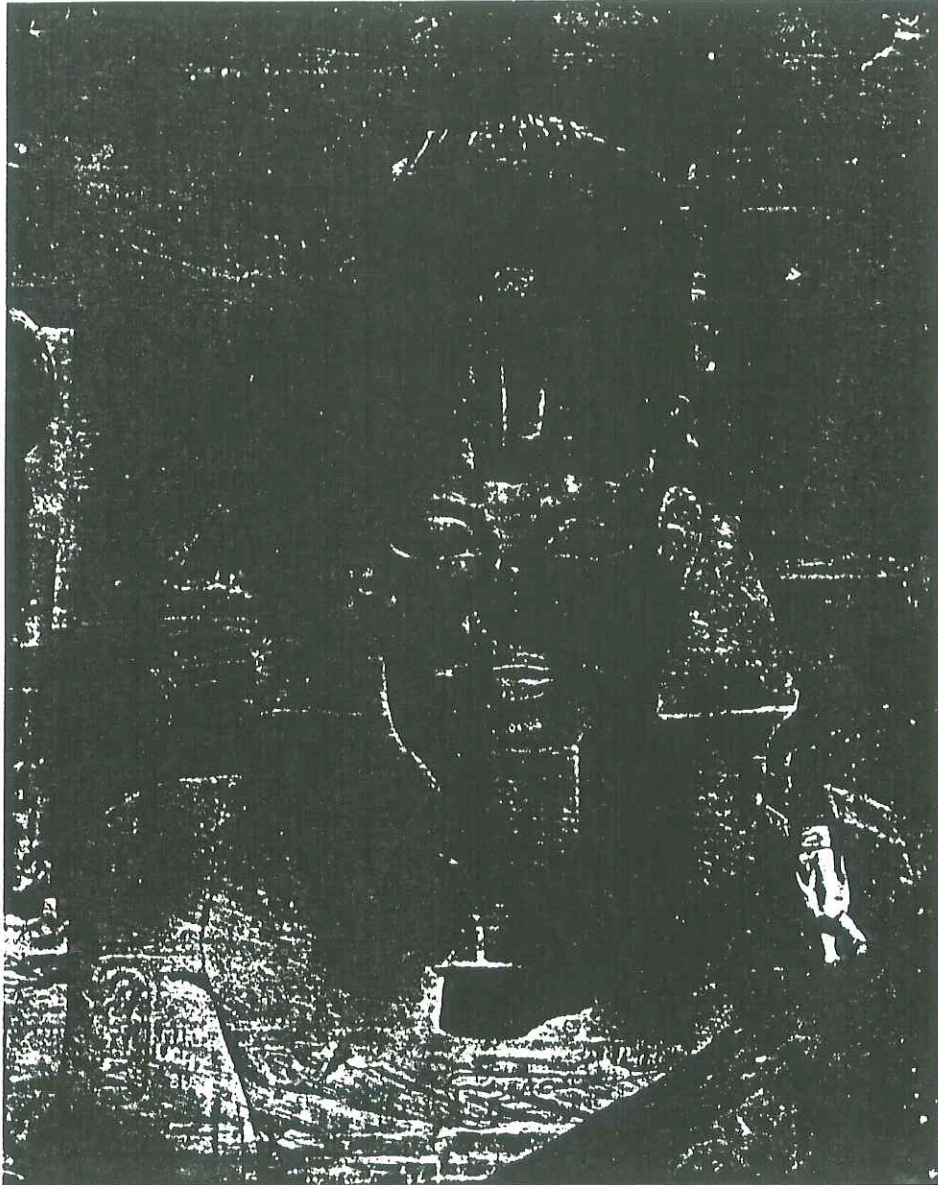


Fig. 11

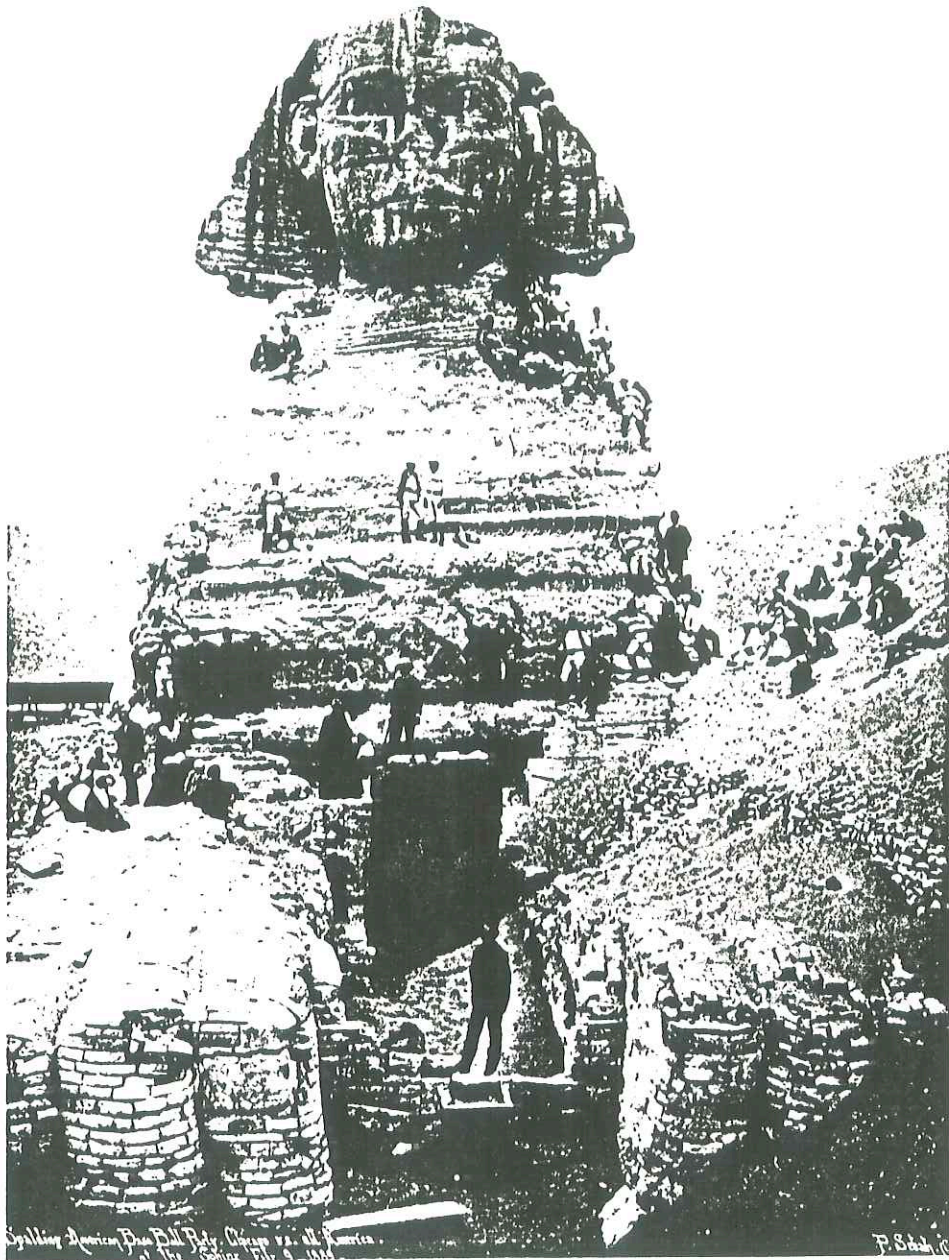
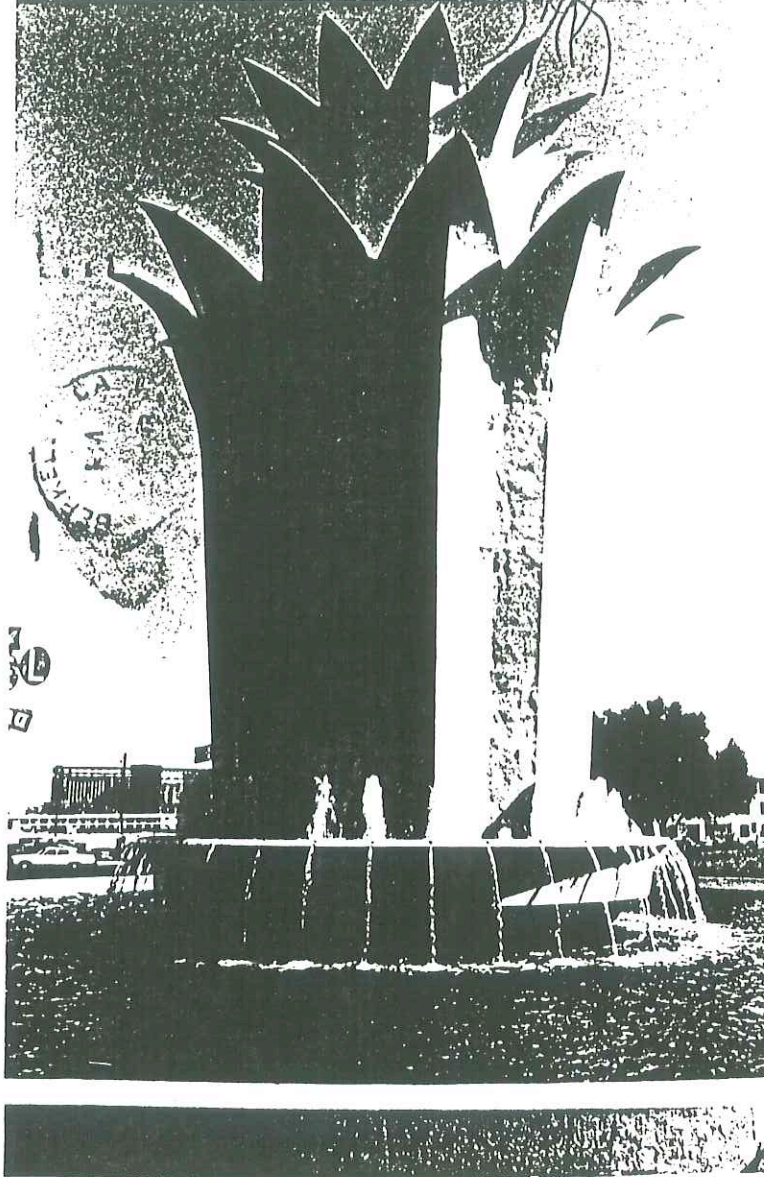


Fig.12



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